

2018 District Convention –

“To Every Town and Village!”

June 4, 2018

Brothers in Christ,

In **Our Synod: *It's Life and Mission***¹ you'll read:

“In 1917 the federated synods of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska adopted a constitution that merged them into a single body, to which they transferred all their rights and properties. According to their agreement, Wisconsin was divided into three separate districts – the Northern Wisconsin District, which included the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the Southeastern Wisconsin District, and the Western Wisconsin District.”

As we gather in convention as the Western Wisconsin District of WELS, there is reason for us to pause and thank our gracious God. For over 100 years He has blessed and sustained us in His Word and His mission of reaching lost souls with Christ!

So, how shall we celebrate 100 years of God's grace and purpose to our district? By gathering for worship and study under the theme ***To Every Town and Village***. As we do, we celebrate Christ's grace to us and the joy He has given by calling us to service in His kingdom. Our convention theme and focus help us again recognize that in the past 100 years Christ's mercy and mission haven't changed, so our mission hasn't changed: We take Christ's gospel message ***To Every Town and Village***.

“The Harvest is plentiful!”

What was true 100 years ago is true today: *The Western Wisconsin District is a mission district*. As we gather in convention may ***To Every Town and Village*** remind us of and recommit us to the plentiful harvest of souls Christ has before us.

The fact that we have numerous churches throughout our district should not give us a false sense of mission accomplished. No, the mission is ongoing; the harvest is still plentiful! There are souls for whom Christ bled and died who are in desperate need of the message of His free love, forgiveness and gift of eternal life. They are the people we meet and greet at the grocery store and gas station. They are the youth and parents we know from sports programs. They are our friends and relatives. They are all around us. “Lord, open our eyes to the harvest before us!”

Again, the nearly 170 congregations of our district should not give us a false sense of mission accomplished. Rather, the number and locations of our congregations are well-positioned gifts from

¹ Author: Elmer Kessing Publisher: NPH

Christ for energetic gospel outreach. Our many congregations and their members have many connections in their communities. Those connections are opportunities for acts of compassion that reflect Christ's compassion, giving ample opportunity to speak to people about their Savior.

As we consider how our congregations can increase evangelism outreach, we are pleased to have with us our first speaker today, Pastor Jon Hein, the director of our WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC). The CCC works to provide support to congregations as they reevaluate their ministry setting, resources and mission. The goal is to help congregations position themselves for active, energetic gospel nurture and outreach. Within this next year, our district's circuit pastors will begin receiving training from CCC so in each circuit of our district we will have a trained resource (boots on the ground) to assist congregations in developing healthy mission and ministry plans.

To lead us into our *To Every Town and Village* theme we also have three leading evangelism voices and examples from our district. We look forward to the presentation by Pastors Joseph Fricke, Andrew Schultz and Nathan Strutz.

“The Workers are few!”

The current preaching and teaching vacancies are witness to the truth of these words of Christ.

Pastoral Vacancies

Following seminary assignments in May, there are still 116 pastoral vacancies with 98 of those being in congregations. 48 requests for seminary assignments went unfilled. Our own district was blessed to receive 2 pastoral candidates assigned into parishes. 7 other WWD requests went unfilled. The new normal pastoral vacancy rate in our district is usually between 15 and 20 vacancies.

Teaching Vacancies

Our WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools currently reports 81 synod-wide teaching vacancies. There are 24 principal vacancies and 7 early childhood director vacancies. At New Ulm in May roughly 40 requests for teachers went unfilled.

As we consider the large number of vacancies within our district several thoughts come to mind:

Our Retired Gospel Ministers

We give thanks to our retired pastors and teachers who regularly assist with congregational and classroom vacancies and semi-retirement Calls. *Your continued service, and joy in that service, is an encouragement from Christ to us all!*

Our Circuit Pastors & Vacancy Pastors

We give thanks to our circuit pastors and other parish pastors who assist congregations during vacancies. *Again, Christ has made your extra service an encouragement to us all!*

Our Cooperative Efforts

We look to each other to consider cooperative, multisite work. The goal is to make better use of our congregational and pastoral resources as we strive to serve the faithful and reach out to others with the gospel. Parts of our presentations at this convention will give ideas for this cooperative work.

Our Recruitment Efforts

As we embrace with new vigor Christ's mission to go *To Every Town and Village*, we also recommit ourselves to vigorous recruitment for the gospel ministry.

We commend the worker training schools for their vigorous recruitment efforts. (Here we would simply highlight one effort, Martin Luther College's *Congregational Partnership Grant Program* <https://mlc-wels.edu/financial-aid/congregational-partner-grant-program/>) But, recruitment for the gospel ministry is not just the work of our WELS Ministerial Education; it's our joyful work as well. May we embrace it with joy!

Discussions are underway regarding ways to communicate the real need and make it a real priority for us all. But, even as these discussions begin, let the grassroots, rubber-hits-the-road discussions begin in your congregation and your homes.

God has and continues to raise up gospel servants in the homes of faithful laymen like our lay delegates here today, people who cherish God's Word and Christ's forgiveness and the ministry through which the gospel is brought. I come from a lay family. My parents' commitment to God's Word and their congregation's mission showed the ministry to be a "noble" task (1 Tim 3:1). And, I know I'm not alone. Around you are dozens and dozens and dozens of "lay kids" who are now gospel ministers...thanks to the encouragement of godly parents and grandparents. ***Dear lay delegates, please make this one of your take home thoughts from this convention: Please encourage the boys and girls in your family and in your congregation to prayerfully consider fulltime gospel service.***

To my brothers in gospel ministry, God has and continues to raise up many gospel ministers in your homes as your children see your joy in serving Christ. ***Let that joy be evident in you and in your home. Intentionally speak to your children of the joy you have in gospel service. Tell them the victories you get to see the Spirit win through the gospel. Brothers, please make this one of your takeaways from convention.***

"Ask the Lord of the Harvest!"

As we proclaim Christ to the faithful, reach out with Christ to the lost, and work to raise up another generation of gospel ministers, we know Christ's promises are sure and certain. So, we pray. We pray to Him whose blood has washed us...to Him whose gospel has revived us...to Him whose gospel wins the lost...to Him who makes a young man or woman's heart desire the noble task of gospel ministry. We pray knowing that all depends on Him. We pray trusting in His perfect faithfulness, asking that His perfect faithfulness would inspire us to even greater faithfulness! We pray to the Lord of the Harvest!

Convention Structure

Almost Paperless Convention

The convention agenda, reports and materials may be found on our Western Wisconsin District website: <https://welswwd.weebly.com/2018-district-convention.html>

Printed materials have been made available for those who requested. There will still be a minimal amount of printed materials distributed.

We thank our Luther Prep hosts for their hospitality and help. If you have any questions or needs, the LPS staff is always ready to assist.

Convention Floor Business

To highlight the work we do together as WELS and the Western Wisconsin District, our limited convention floor time has been reserved for synod and district reports.

WELS Affiliated Ministries (Parasynodicals)

Other groups of our fellowship with ministries close to our hearts have booths in the lobby and/or materials posted on our convention website as well. (<https://welswwd.weebly.com/2018-district-convention.html>).

We welcome these ministries, thank them for the services they continually provide and encourage delegates to visit their booths and check out their posted materials. As of the completion of this report the following groups have posted materials for your consideration on our website.

Christian Life Resources
Conquerors Through Christ
The Lutheran Home Association
Truth in Love Ministry
Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service / Christian Family Solutions
Wisconsin Lutheran College

District Call Report

The 2018 District Convention Call Report which includes the Call Activity of the past biennium is posted on our district website:

https://welswwd.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/4/1/10412170/2018_ww_district_presidents_report_-_2018_convention_call_report.pdf

This report will be reviewed by the floor committee for the District President's Report, especially for the necessary transfers into district membership of pastors, male teachers and male staff ministers.

Retiring Gospel Ministers

On the report you'll find a listing of pastors, teachers and staff ministers who have or are retiring after years of faithful gospel service. We rejoice in God's goodness to these fellow servants throughout the years, we thank them for their service to Christ's Church and ask that our Savior bless them in this next chapter of His grace.

Final Report - Hope, Dousman

The district's documentation regarding the suspension of Pastor Jason Ewart and Hope, Dousman has been made available and is still available upon request. All documentation is also available to the District President's Report floor committee. In keeping with our district constitution, your praesidium offers the following brief final report.

On February 9, 2017, following over a half decade of multiple attempts at evangelical, patient instruction and correction, Pastor Jason Ewart was suspended from our district's ministerium due to his departure from the evangelical Lutheran proclamation and his dishonesty in the matter. He had the right of appeal and was informed of that right but chose not to exercise it.

The leadership of Hope, while fully informed of the issues regarding Pastor Ewart's suspension, would not allow the District Praesidium to speak with the membership of Hope. When the leadership of Hope repeatedly informed the district that they were resolute in retaining Jason Ewart as their pastor, Hope congregation was suspended from district membership on May 26, 2017. The congregation had the right of appeal and was informed of that right but chose not to exercise it.

Since the suspension, Hope has secured two non-denomination ministers and become an official ministry partner of Andy Stanley's North Point Ministries (<http://northpointpartners.org/search>).

Reformation 500

We again offer our thanks to all who planned or participated in our October 2017 district service commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. It was a celebration worthy of the restoration of gospel proclamation. The service was a great encouragement for us to hold tightly to Christ and the **Timeless Truths** of His Word. To God be the glory!

+ In Memoriam +

At the end of our Convention Call Report you'll find the names of the gospel ministers throughout our synod that have been called home to Christ during this past biennium.

https://welswwd.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/4/1/10412170/2018_ww_district_presidents_report_-_2018_convention_call_report.pdf

In keeping with our longstanding tradition, we thank our Savior and remember our departed fellow servants as we rise to sing *For All the Saints*.

1. For all the saints who from their labors rest,
All who their faith before the world confessed,
Your name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!
2. You were their rock, their fortress, and their might;
You, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight
And in the darkness drear their one true light. Alleluia! Alleluia!
3. Oh, may your soldiers, faithful, true, and bold
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
And win with them the victor's crown of gold. Alleluia! Alleluia!
4. Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine,
Yet all are one within your grand design. Alleluia! Alleluia!
5. And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph-song,
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!
6. The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon, to faithful warriors comes their rest.
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!
7. But then there breaks a yet more glorious day:
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on his way. Alleluia! Alleluia!
8. From earth's wide bounds to ocean's farthest coast
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Changes in District Officers

Circuit Pastors

Election of circuit pastors will take place later today. We again thank all the men who serve in these positions. We take this opportunity to thank those we know have left their position or declined nomination because of Calls taken elsewhere or the press of other responsibilities.

Pastor Shaun Arndt (Mississippi River Valley Conference – La Crosse Circuit)
Pastor David Brandt (Southwestern Conference – Northern Circuit)
Pastor Timothy Biebert (Mid-State Circuit)
Pastor Tim Gumm (Blackhawk South Circuit)
Pastor Daniel Iwinski (Southern Wisillowa Circuit)
Pastor Scott Schwertfeger (Capitol Circuit)
Pastor Luke Werre (Capitol Circuit)

Praesidium

In November 2017, 1st VP Jerry Ewings accepted a Call to serve as a counselor in our WELS Ministry of Christian Giving.

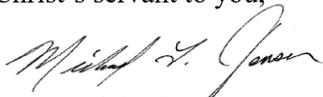
We thank Pastor Ewings for his many years of service in our district at Lakeside Lutheran High School and Lord of Love, DeForest, as well as his years of service as a circuit pastor and member of our praesidium. We're also thankful that his new position has him working with the people of our district.

By constitution 2nd VP Brett Brauer became our 1st VP and a new 2nd VP was appointed. We are grateful to God that Pastor Jeff Seelow, a longtime circuit pastor in our district, accepted appointment to this praesidium position in December 2017.

Allow me a personal note of thanks to these men and to you for providing them for service on our praesidium. Pastors Ewings, Brauer, Seelow and Pastor Galen Riediger (District Secretary) have been true blessings from Christ!

Finally, I thank my Savior and you for the underserved privilege of serving as your district president these past two years. Your encouragement, support and prayers for me and my family have been greatly appreciated. To work with you for Christ and His people is a joy!

Christ's servant to you,



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